Tennessee

APR 9/78

King Death Costly to Taxpayers

By JOE HATCHER
Special to The Journal-Constitution

NASHVILLE — Memphis memorialized Dr. Martin Luther King's death, April 4, ten years ago, with parades and church services for the assassinated black leader, but the Tennessee taxpayers generally bemoaned the fact that King's death had been by far the most expensive crime ever committed in the state.

Dr. King's assassination may have paled in some quarters but it has never ceased to be a thorn in the side of Tennessee officialdom and the Tennessee taxpayer.

From the firing of the shot that fatally wounded Dr. King on April 3, 1968, the pursuit of the killer became one of the most costly items such an investigation ever instigated. The capture of James Earl Ray in London and his return to Memphis was the highest price ever paid by taxpayers for a fugitive. His incarceration in Memphis jails until his trial added to the soaring costs. His plea of guilty brought him a life sentence instead of the death penalty, which was legal then in the state.

Since that time Ray has hired and fired attorneys right and left and filed suit after suit going all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

He has attempted to escape several times but was unsuccessful until he fled Brushy Mountain prison for about two days. In the wilderness of the mountains, blood hounds hunted him down.

He has been confined in solitary but has sued to be released into the general prison population. He has sued against transfer to Brushy Mountain prison, and against his treatment under various conditions.

Almost constantly, he seeks a new trial, claiming he was pressured into confessing and pleading guilty. He has lost in state and federal courts repeatedly.

His 99-year term has been extended for his escape from Bushy Mountain despite his claim he escaped because he was serving as an innocent man. He now has produced a picture which he identifies as the Raoul who paid him to buy the rifle and conspire to kill King.

His latest lawyer, Mark Lane, who is pressing the inquiries into the Kennedy and King assassinations, now contends that the FBI is suspect in the conspiracy against King. He has the latest photograph which Ray says is that of the mysterious Raoul, whom he has never really identified.

Thousands marched in Memphis on April 4 to memorialize King's death. The march passed the Lorraine Motel where King was shot, and where his room is a permanent memorial to his memory.

The state will some day get around to figuring how many millions James Earl Ray has cost the taxpayers, but as of now, nobody argues that a record has been set.